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Seventh-day Adventism, Doctrinal Statements, and Unity

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1. Introduction

“All Christians engage in confessional synthesis,” wrote theologian Carl R. Trueman.¹ Some religious groups adhere to a public confession of faith as subject to public scrutiny whereas others are immune to such scrutiny. Early Seventh-day Adventists, with strong ties to the Christian Connexion, feared lest the creation of a statement of beliefs so that some at some point may disagree with that statement may at some point be excluded.² Another danger was that statements of belief might be used to present making new discoveries from Scripture, or afterward a new truth might be stifled by appealing to the authority of an already established creed. From the perspective of early Sabbatarian Adventists, some remembered the time when during the Millerite revival that statements of belief were used to exclude them from church fellowship.³

These fears were aptly expressed during the earliest organizational developments in 1861 of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. According to denominational co-founder, James White: “making a creed is setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement. . . . The Bible is

¹ Carl R. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 21.

² Bert B. Haloviak, “Heritage of Freedom,” unpublished manuscript, 2.

³ George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 21-24.

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our creed.”⁴ Another Adventist minister, J. N. Loughborough, reiterated their collective fear: “[T]he first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such.”⁵

It is well known that Seventh-day Adventists were fiercely anti-creedal.⁶ Their confessional synthesis morphed from a private statement of beliefs (1872) that was considered somewhat normative among early believers.⁷ The next statement gradually became somewhat more visible (1931) until it finally became an official and public statement of belief (1980). Like most evangelical Christians, Seventh-day Adventists adhered to the antebellum mantra of “the Bible and the Bible alone.” The theological crisis that resulted from the American Civil War (1861-1865) made it especially clear that this dictum was not sufficient because some of the brightest religious minds on both sides of the conflict claimed “the Bible and the Bible alone” both for and against slavery.⁸ Thus, within Seventh-day Adventism there was internal as well as external factors that contributed to the milieu within which Seventh-day Adventists birthed their statements of belief.

The fact that each of the Seventh-day Adventist statements of belief

⁴ “Doings of the Battle Creek Conference, Oct. 5 & 6, 1861,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 8, 1861, 148.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ S. Joseph Kidder, “Creeds and Statements of Belief in Early Adventist Thought,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring 2009), 101-116. Kidder overviews 8 statements of beliefs between 1850 and 1931 that juxtapose Adventist opposition against creedalism while at the same time a growing acceptance of a statement of beliefs. They harmonized this contradiction by highlighting that creeds were unchangeable, discouraged Bible study, and rigid. The acceptance of “fundamental beliefs” allowed early Adventist leaders to define their beliefs while still maintaining their rejection of a formal creed.

⁷ Smith noted that although this 1872 statement was his personal statement that it was however also representative of beliefs generally believed by early Sabbatarian Adventists. He invited people to object to what he wrote. There is no extant evidence that anyone took him up on this challenge, which supports the claim that such a statement should be considered as normative of early Sabbatarian Adventist beliefs at that time.

⁸ For a survey, see Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

(1872, 1931, 1980) affirmed the “Bible and the Bible alone” as their only “creed” demonstrates a commitment to progressive revelation. They recognized their need to have a flexible confession of faith. At the same time, all of these statements of belief, as they morphed from private to public, indicate some form of exclusion. Who were they meant to exclude? Why was each written? The purpose of this paper is to examine the development of these three statements of belief and how they contributed to the development of Seventh-day Adventist theology. This article will build on the research of others to emphasize the contextual and formative influences surrounding each of these statements.⁹ The process of behind the formation of Adventist statements of belief is instructive by revealing underlying assumptions about unity within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

2. The 1872 Fundamental Principles

Within a decade fierce anti-creedalism melted away. “Our views are maintained by the Bible,” noted Adventist minister D. T. Bourdeau in 1874. “Our people are united on doctrine. But we are careful not to retard the work of reform and advancement in the truth by binding ourselves by human creeds to believe just what your fathers believed, right or wrong.”¹⁰ Such openness toward the articulation of doctrinal statements is evident as church leaders during the first decade after the formation of the General Conference defined their beliefs.

⁹ The most extensive studies on the formation of Adventist statements of belief is Rolph J. Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2000), and Karen K. Abrahamson, “Adventist Statements of Belief: A Comparison of Five Statements Covering the Period 1872-1980,” unpublished paper, Andrews University, 1999. This paper focuses on contextual and formative influences that led to the development of the three most prominent statements of belief (1872, 1931, 1980) as a mechanism for analyzing the development of Seventh-day Adventist theology. Other helpful, but more specific treatments, include Sergio Silva, “Development of the Fundamental Beliefs Statement with Particular Reference to Fundamental Belief Number 6: Creation,” *JATS* 21, no. 1-2 (2010), 14-44; Fritz Guy, “Uncovering the Origins of the Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs,” *Spectrum* 32 (2004): 18-29; Denis Fortin, “Nineteenth Century Evangelicalism and Early Statements of Belief,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36 (1998), 51-67.

¹⁰ D. T. Bourdeau, “Thoughts by the Way. Converted to God and Converted to Man,” *Review and Herald*, Feb. 17, 1874, 77.

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Two years earlier (1872) Uriah Smith published *Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists*¹¹ to help explain Adventist beliefs to others outside of Seventh-day Adventism, especially in light of recent criticisms:

Our only object is to meet this necessity [criticisms]. As Seventh-day Adventists we desire simply that our position shall be understood; and we are the more solicitous for this because there are many who call themselves Adventists who hold views with which we can have no sympathy, some of which, we think, are subversive of the plainest and most important principles set forth in the word of God. As compared with other Adventists, Seventh-day Adventists differ from one class in believing in the unconscious state of the dead, and the final destruction of the unrepentant wicked; from another, in believing in the perpetuity of the law of God as summarily contained in the ten commandments, in the operation of the Holy Spirit in the church, and in setting no times for the advent to occur; from all, in the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord, and in many applications of the prophetic scriptures.¹²

For Uriah Smith, who commented regularly on publications received from various other Adventist entities, he recognized that Seventh-day Adventists were all too often confused with these other Adventist groups. Smith regularly used his editorial pen to try to set the record straight. Thus this statement was intended to provide greater clarity to distinguish themselves from other Adventist denominations, and in turn, provide additional clarity for outsiders.

This statement furthermore implies tension between early Seventh-day Adventists and other Adventist groups. This is not surprising since other Adventist groups developed their own statements of belief. The Albany Conference, on May 1, 1845, developed a statement for the majority of Millerite Adventists after the Millerite disappointment. This statement was affirmed at least twice. A second major statement, adopted by the Evangelical Adventists in 1869, indicates their own theological and

¹¹ [Uriah Smith], *Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1872).

¹² Ibid.

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organizational maturity. Denis Fortin has analyzed these two statements and compared them with the first Seventh-day Adventist statement of belief in 1872.¹³ He argues that together they demonstrate “similar religious roots and theological heritage, and some divergent theological frames of reference.” These two latter statements of beliefs (1869, 1872) show both an evangelical heritage with “a different understanding of anthropology. Seventh-day Adventists were the most theologically removed from evangelicalism in emphasizing their doctrine of the sanctuary as the center of their theological articulation.”¹⁴

Seventh-day Adventist minister J. N. Andrews acknowledged the 1869 Evangelical Adventist Statement of Beliefs.¹⁵ Any apparent warmth belies increased tensions with these other affiliated Adventist traditions.¹⁶ James and Ellen G. White met Miles Grant, the leader of the Advent Christian Church on a train in 1868.¹⁷ In the conversation Grant stated: “I can worship with you, but your views will not let you [to] worship with me.” James White mistook this as a gesture of good will and followed it up the next year by bringing a small delegation to attend one of their camp meetings in Illinois. They were kicked off the campground.¹⁸ Joshua V. Himes tried to intervene, but Grant and Himes were already in a power struggle that culminated with the expulsion of Himes in 1876. This humiliation on the part of the Whites was met with an additional “testimony” by Ellen G. White titled “Opposing Adventists” (3T 36-39) in which she described “our most bitter opponents are found among the first-day Adventists.” Seventh-day Adventists, she admonished, should never engage with them in such “unjust warfare.” Instead “silent contempt”

¹³ Denis Fortin, “Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism and Early Adventist Statements of Beliefs,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring 1998), 51-67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

¹⁵ J. N. Andrews, “The Creed of the Evangelical Adventists,” *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 6, 1869, 12-13.

¹⁶ It should be noted that the Evangelical Adventists were led by Josiah Litch, whereas Joshua V. Himes and Miles Grant were leaders of the Advent Christian Church. Although initially united together, they separated from each other in 1860 over the immortality versus non-immortality of the soul.

¹⁷ James White, “Eastern Tour,” *Review and Herald*, Nov. 17, 1868, 244-245.

¹⁸ I have only located James White’s version of what occurred so far in my research. His version of what transpired was then published by Uriah Smith. See: [Uriah Smith], “Springfield Camp-meeting,” *Review and Herald Extra*, April 14, 1874, 2.

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was the “best approach.”¹⁹ For his part Miles Grant held a personal vendetta against the Whites as well as Seventh-day Adventists in general going out of his way to attack both Ellen G. White and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Early exchanges between Seventh-day Adventists and other Adventist traditions contributed to the formulation of early statements of beliefs from 1869 to 1872. Each sought to define their own identity and to distinguish oneself from others. James White desired to develop a warm relationship between Seventh-day Adventists and what they broadly described as “first-day Adventists” that could be similar to the cordial relationship they had with the Seventh Day Baptist Church. His desire to have such a relationship did not materialize. In the process it culminated with a confession of faith written by *Review and Herald* editor Uriah Smith that defined the boundaries of belief between the two denominations. At the heart of the 1872 Fundamental Principles was the doctrine of the sanctuary. This more than anything else defined the unique theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

3. The 1931 Statement of Beliefs

On Dec. 29, 1930, the General Conference Executive Committee noted a request from missionaries in Africa for a Statement of Beliefs.²⁰ Adventist historians consider the 1920s the “golden age” of Adventist missions as new mission stations, schools, and clinics blossomed around the globe. The growth of missions appears to have been a catalyst but not necessarily the primary motivation for the 1931 Statement of Beliefs. The official request came through H. Edson Rogers who desired to place a statement of beliefs in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. General Conference president Charles H. Watson noted that he along with three others (M. E. Kern, F. M. Wilcox, and E. R. Palmer) formed a committee of four to review this statement of Fundamental Beliefs.²¹ According to Watson, the real impetus for this “Statement of Beliefs” was the aggressive charges made by dissident E. S. Ballenger in *The Gathering Call*, which prompted church

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 36, 37.

²⁰ General Conference Committee Minutes, Dec. 29, 1930, 195.

²¹ *Ibid.*

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leaders for a “true statement of essential points of faith.” He additionally noted that no formal approval was given to the statement so that it would not be considered a “fixed creed.”²² Adventist authors R. F. Cottrell and Lowell Tarling both document the strain that Ballenger’s challenges to the sanctuary doctrine had on this time period.²³ If this was not enough, two other rather prominent Adventists, W. W. Fletcher and L. R. Conradi, both defected and objected to the sanctuary doctrine shortly before the 1931 (Statement of Beliefs.) Minutes and correspondence from General Conference administration in 1930 indicate that Fletcher and Conradi presented challenges that took up a considerable amount of time and resources.²⁴

F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald*, wrote the primary draft of the document that was published in the 1931 *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* and the 1932 *Church Manual*. While change was possible, the primary ethos from this time was to avoid a “fixed creed.” Thus, the 1946 General Conference session voted “that no revision of this Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, as it now appears in the *Manual*, shall be made at any time except at a General Conference session.”²⁵ In effect this made it much more difficult to make any changes to Adventist beliefs.

Of the 25 beliefs listed in 1872, the list was condensed down to 22 beliefs (1931). A comparison of the two lists of beliefs reveals some important shifts:

²² [Leroy Edwin Froom], “Historical Background of 1931 ‘Fundamental Beliefs,’” General Conference Archives, Record Group 11 (1950-1959), Folder 3005.

²³ Raymond Cottrell, “The ‘Sanctuary Doctrine,’—Asset or Liability,” unpublished paper, 2002; Lowell Tarling, *The Edges of Seventh-day Adventism: A Study of Separatist Groups Emerging from the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1844-1980)* (Barragga Bay, Australia: Galilee Publications, 1981).

²⁴ Cf. M. E. Kern to C. H. Watson, July 27, 1930; O. Montgomery to C. H. Watson, July 28, 1930; C. H. Watson to W. G. Turner, Aug. 4, 1930; O. Montgomery to C. H. Watson, Aug. 4, 1930. All correspondence from the Presidential General Files, General Conference Archives record group 11, box 11.

²⁵ *Review and Herald*, June 14, 1946, pg. 197. See also “Meeting of the Officers’ Council,” Minutes, July 15, 1930; July 27, 1930; Jan. 4, 1931; Oct. 23, 1931.

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Exhibit 1: Comparison of 1872 and 1931 Statements of Beliefs		
1872	Status	1931
	New	"The Godhead, or Trinity" (2).
"That there is one God, a personal, spiritual being, the creator of all things." (1)	Merging	"That Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father." (3)
"That there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the one by whom God created all things." (2)		
The Holy Scriptures. (3)	Same	The Holy Scriptures. (1)
Baptism is an ordinance. (4)	Same	Baptism is an ordinance. (5)
The New Birth. (5)	Same	The New Birth. (4)
Prophecy is a part of God's revelation to man. (6)	New	
World history fulfills Bible prophecy. (7)	New	
The Millennium. (8)	Same	Millennial reign of Christ. (21)
The 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:14. (9)	Same	Prophetic period of Daniel 8:14 terminated in 1844. (13)
Sanctuary of the New Covenant is the Tabernacle of God in Heaven. (10)	Similar	True sanctuary in heaven was a type. (14)
The Ten Commandments. (11)	Same	The Ten Commandments. (6)
The seventh-day Sabbath. (12)	Same	The seventh-day Sabbath. (7)
The Papacy Changed the Sabbath. (13)	New	
Repentance and Conversion. (14)	Merging	The ten commandments points out sin, the penalty of which is death, which can only be kept through the "enabling power of the indwelling Christ." (8)
Grace to Keep God's Law. (15)		
Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts. (16)	Same	Perpetuity of spiritual gifts. (19)
Three Angels of Revelation 14. (17)	Same	Work of threefold message of Revelation 14. (15)
Cleansing of the Sanctuary coincides with the Investigative Judgment. (18)	Expansion	True sanctuary corresponds with judgment phase of Christ's ministry in heaven. (14)
		The time of the threefold message corresponds with the investigative judgment. (16)
The Grave is a Place of Darkness. (19)	Same	Humans are mortal. Only God is immortal. (9)
Human beings are reduced to a state of unconsciousness. (20)	Same	"Condition of man in death is one of unconsciousness." (10)

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Bodily resurrection at Second Advent of Christ. (21)	Merging	"Resurrection both of the just and of the unjust" at Second Coming of Christ. (11)
At the Second Coming the Living Righteous are "changed in a moment." (22)		
These immortalized ones are taken to heaven for millennium. (23)	Same	Millennial reign of Christ. (21)
Final Destruction of wicked at end of millennium. (24)	Same	"Impenitent . . . reduced to a state of nonexistence" (12)
New heavens and new earth. (25)	Same	Restoration of earth at end of Millennium. (22)
	New	"Body is the temple of God and therefore should "abstain from all intoxicating drinks, tobacco, and other narcotics, and to avoid every body and soul-defiling habit and practice." (17)
	New	"Divine principle of tithes and offerings for the support of the gospel." (18)
	New	"The Second Coming of Christ is the great hope of the church" (20)

A comparison of the two statements (1872, 1931) demonstrates a shifting emphasis within Adventist theology. Clearly the 1931 "Statement of Beliefs" was informed by the earlier 1872 "Statement of Beliefs." At the same time theological priorities had definitely changed by 1931.

The 1931 list of beliefs was less concerned with Bible prophecy than the earlier 1872 statement was (note the exclusion of 1872 beliefs #6, 7, 8). The 1931 statement also demonstrates an increased interest in defining the sanctuary doctrine and confirmed Watson's recollection of challenges to the sanctuary doctrine by Ballenger (and others) as the primary cause for the new statement of beliefs. The renewed interest and affirmation of the sanctuary doctrine is showcased by how much attention was given to it. The earlier statement (belief #18 in 1872) was expanded into two separate beliefs (#14 & 16). These two beliefs formed the most points of belief from the 1931 "Statement of Beliefs."

Other notable theological observations include a trend toward consolidation. The beliefs of repentance and conversion (#14) and keeping God's law (#15) in 1872 were combined into a single belief (#8). Furthermore, the bodily resurrection (#21) at the Second Coming (#22) in

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1872 were combined in 1931 into a single belief (#11). These helped to shorten the overall list.

Also of note were new doctrinal additions in 1931 that included the doctrine of the “Trinity, or Godhead” (#2), the body as the temple of God as the basis for healthful living (#17), and tithes and offerings (#18). While the Second Coming was listed separately, it was largely implied collectively in the other beliefs in the 1872 “Statement of Beliefs.” Merlin D. Burt, director of the Center for Adventist Research, has done a careful analysis of the development of the Adventist understanding of the Trinity doctrine, which he argues was largely confirmed with the 1931 *Fundamental Beliefs* even if some dissonance occurred afterward.²⁶ And finally, the new focus on Adventist lifestyle along with tithes and offerings (a focus on outward behaviors) corresponded somewhat with the rise of the historical Fundamentalist movement and a new preoccupation with Adventist lifestyle in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁷

Early efforts to distinguish theological beliefs between Adventist denominations from 1869 to 1872 gave way eventually to a new set of challenges from within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the late 1920s and early 1930s. During this time evidence of gradual development can be seen with the new belief of the Trinity, first promulgated in the 1890s, and that represented a consolidation of this shift in the 1931 “Statement of Beliefs.” More significantly, the 1931 “Statement of Beliefs” showcases a greater clarification about the sanctuary doctrine. Clearly Seventh-day Adventists were concerned about Ballenger and others when they wrote the 1931 “Statement of Beliefs.” The new confession was written by four people instead of just one. While the editor of the *Review and Herald*, as in 1872, wrote the primary draft, the process indicates a subtle shift from

²⁶ Merlin D. Burt, “History of Seventh-day Adventist Views on the Trinity,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 2006), 125-139.

²⁷ Fundamentalism is recognized as one of the three elements of American Protestantism (the others being American revivalism and Pentecostalism). The historical Fundamentalist movement within American religion is recognized as being “more conservative socially, religiously, and probably politically.” In addition, such Christians tended to want a clear and familiar message with specific lifestyle requirements that differentiated insiders from outsiders. See Jeremy Morris, *The Church in the Modern Age*. The I. B. Tauris History of the Christian Church (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 114-115.

a private to a more visible and therefore public confession. Perhaps the greatest shift was that the sanctuary doctrine was clarified and affirmed as the central focus for Adventist beliefs.

4. The 1980 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists

A significant change from the previous two statements of belief (1872, 1931) was the public adoption of the 1980 “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists”²⁸ during the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, Texas.²⁹ The 1946 resolution by the General Conference in session that no changes to the “Statement of Fundamental Beliefs” as published in the *Church Manual* created this more public venue. Just like both previous statements of beliefs, the preamble affirmed that “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed, and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.” The way was left open for possible future revisions.³⁰

As early as 1974 a suggestion was made that the list of fundamental beliefs needed to include the Lord’s Supper.³¹ Shortly afterward there was a significant push for doctrinal statements about creation and inspiration. These latter statements appear to be the driving force behind a new statement of fundamental beliefs. A new generation of scientists and popular promulgation of evolution presented new challenges to a Seventh-day Adventist understanding of origins. Some Seventh-day Adventist educators went so far as to advocate theistic evolution. These issues combined with new questions about the inspiration and authority of Ellen G. White that were raised by the publication of Ronald L. Numbers’ book *Prophetess of Health* (1974). The General Conference Officers (PREXAD) cited growing concern that heightened in 1979 with additional allegations that Ellen G. White plagiarized most of her writings from disaffected Seventh-day Adventist minister Walter Rea. These new challenges were especially problematic as church leaders found traditional books such as

²⁸ Referred to subsequently as “1980 Fundamental Beliefs.”

²⁹ For an overview, see Lawrence T. Geray, “A New Statement of Fundamental Beliefs,” *Spectrum*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1980), 2-13.

³⁰ Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 23-24.

³¹ President’s Administrative Council (PRADCO) Minutes, May 29, 1974, 74-83 (A-649), General Conference Archives.

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Questions on Doctrine and L. E. Froom's *Movement of Destiny*³² to be too problematic to explain Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. Something new and more definitive was needed to meet these new challenges.

During the 1970s this complex milieu contributed to the need for a new and official statement of beliefs. General Conference vice-president, W. Duncan Eva, led a team that included B. E. Seton, C. E. Bradford, N. R. Dower, C. O. Franz, W. J. Hackett, Richard Hamill, G. M. Hyde, Alf Lohne, and A. L. White.³³ General Conference president, Robert H. Pearson, served in an *ex officio* capacity, and then after his resignation in late 1979 due to health, the newly elected Neal C. Wilson supported the development of a statement of fundamental beliefs. The initial draft of the statement was significantly rewritten and largely adopted by professors at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Additional input came from a draft published in the *Adventist Review* in which readers were given an opportunity to ask questions and submit suggestions.³⁴

The level of anxiety increased significantly with new challenges from Australian Bible teacher Desmond Ford. At first church leaders tried to help calm the waters by relocating him as a "visiting professor" at Pacific Union College, but the plan backfired after he presented his doubts about the sanctuary doctrine on October 27, 1979.³⁵ He questioned the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary including the investigative judgment. A follow-up committee examined his 991-page manuscript, *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment*. Church leaders gathered 114 individuals in August 1980 at Glacier View Ranch. Ford was ultimately dismissed as a minister and religion professor. Although his case was not officially decided until after the 1980 "Fundamental Beliefs" was voted on April 25, 1980, the anxiety certainly contributed to the

³² Minutes [of the] Righteousness by Faith Study Group, February 27, 1975 [filed under PRADCO minutes], General Conference Archives.

³³ PRADCO Minutes, March 24, 1976, 76-32 (X-1535), General Conference Archives.

³⁴ For a general overview see Malcolm Bull & Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 94-97. See also Larence Geraty, "A New Statement of Fundamental Beliefs," *Spectrum* 11, no. 1 (July 1980), 2-13; Gary Land, "Coping with Change, 1961-1980," in *Adventism in America*, ed. Gary Land (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 171-189.

³⁵ President's Executive Advisory (PREXAD) Minutes, December 4, 1979, 79-113 to 79-115, General Conference Archives.

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theological tension in the time period leading up to the new statement of fundamental beliefs including a strong re-affirmation of the doctrine of the sanctuary.³⁶ Apologetic responses to challenges about the sanctuary and the inspiration of Ellen G. White continued through the 1980s.³⁷ Such concerns raised questions about Adventist theological priorities. A comparison and contrast of the 1931 and 1980 statements of beliefs showcases these priorities:

Exhibit 2. Comparison of 1931 and 1980 Statements of Beliefs	
The Holy Scriptures. (1)	The Holy Scriptures. (1)
“The Godhead, or Trinity” (2).	The Trinity. (2)
	God the Father. (3)
“That Jesus Christ is very God, being of the same nature and essence as the Eternal Father.” (3)	God the Son. (4)
	God the Holy Spirit. (5)
	Creation. (6)
	The Great Controversy. (8)
The New Birth. (4)	
Baptism is an ordinance. (5)	Baptism and (13a)
	The Lord’s Supper (13b)
The Ten Commandments. (6)	The Ten Commandments. (18)
The seventh-day Sabbath. (7)	The Sabbath. (19)
The ten commandments points out sin, the penalty of which is death, which can only be kept through the “enabling power of the indwelling Christ.” (8)	The Experience of Salvation. (10)
Humans are mortal. Only God is immortal. (9)	The Nature of Man. (7)
“Condition of man in death is one of unconsciousness.” (10)	Death and Resurrection. (23)
“Resurrection both of the just and of the unjust” at Second Coming of Christ. (11)	
“Impenitent . . . reduced to a state of nonexistence” (12)	
Prophetic period of Daniel 8:14 terminated in 1844. (13)	The Heavenly Sanctuary and the Judgment. (24)

³⁶ “Fourteenth Business Meeting, Fifty-third General Conference Session, April 25, 1980, 9:30 AM,” *Adventist Review*, May 1, 1980, 215-218.

³⁷ Floyd Greenleaf and Richard Schwarz, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 636-646.

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True sanctuary in heaven was a type and corresponds with judgment phase of Christ's ministry in heaven. (14)	
Work of threefold message of Revelation 14. (15)	(included in 16)
The time of the threefold message corresponds with the investigative judgment. (16)	(included in 24)
"Body is the temple of God and therefore should "abstain from all intoxicating drinks, tobacco, and other narcotics, and to avoid every body and soul-defiling habit and practice." (17)	Style of Life. (21)
"Divine principle of tithes and offerings for the support of the gospel." (18)	Stewardship. (20) [Broadening of belief]
Perpetuity of spiritual gifts. (19)	Spiritual Gifts. (14)
	The Spirit of Prophecy. (15)
"The Second Coming of Christ is the great hope of the church" (20)	The Second Advent of Christ. (25)
Millennial reign of Christ. (21)	The Millennium and the End of Sin. (26)
Restoration of earth at end of Millennium. (22)	The New Earth. (27)
	The Death of Christ. (9)
	The Church. (11)
	Unity in the Body of Christ. (12)
	Mission of the Remnant Church. (16) [Similar to point 20 but with different emphasis.]
	The Ministries of the Church. (17)
	Marriage and the Family. (22)

The 1980 "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists" was an affirmation of much of the 1931, and by extension 1872, statements of beliefs. Similar to the 1931 "Statement of Beliefs" the 1980 "Statement of Fundamental Beliefs" strongly affirmed the doctrine of the sanctuary. In fact, it synthesized points 13, 14, and 16 into a single doctrinal belief (#24 "The Heavenly Sanctuary and the Judgment"). The Mission of the "threefold message" of Revelation 14 (#20 in 1931) was broadened to use "Remnant Church" language (1980 belief #16). Other changes include nuance such as the expansion of the doctrine on baptism (#5) in 1931 to couple it with the addition of the Lord's Supper in 1980 (#13). Adventist eschatology was re-emphasized, similar to the 1972 Statement, by providing a new doctrinal statement on "The Great Controversy (#8)).

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Similarly, Adventist lifestyle concerns were expanded to include a new and separate doctrine on “Marriage and the Family” (#22).

A significant change in the 1980 statement has largely been observed by Rolf J. Pöhler in his *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching* (2000) about the development of a distinctive Adventist ecclesiology.³⁸ This corresponded, as Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart have astutely noted, with an emphasis on ecclesiology within other religious traditions. “Adventists were not entirely alone in this since there was a late-twentieth-century rediscovery of the doctrine of the church on the part of other evangelicals.”³⁹ For the 1980 “Fundamental Beliefs” this development corresponded with beliefs in “The Church” (#11) that defined Christ as the head, “Unity in the Body of Christ” (#12), and “The Ministries of the Church” (#17). Clearly a new theological priority for Seventh-day Adventists was ecclesiology. Each of the statements was furthermore written in a much more relational way as drafters worked to become more intentional to relate doctrines to actual practice. At the same time the boundaries of orthodoxy were being spelled out. Soon afterward, Bull and Lockhart observed, this took on tangible form when church leaders trademarked the name “Seventh-day Adventist” (1981).⁴⁰ Denominational leaders clarified who could or could not use, and therefore benefit, from the official identity of the church.

Another significant addition to the 1980 statement was a doctrinal statement on “Creation” (#6) that highlighted new interest into defining origins. The earliest statement (1872) this was largely assumed as evolution was promptly rejected. In the 1931 statement, following the heyday of the Fundamentalist movement during the 1920s, this was again simply assumed. Yet by 1980 there were new challenges as thought leaders wrestled between issues related to science and religion, and questions about the origins of the earth.

³⁸ Rolf J. Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2000), 257-276.

³⁹ Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 50, 381, fn. 75. The Adventist application was filed with the United States Patent and Trademark Office on May 7, 1980, and was registered as no. 1,177,185 on November 10, 1981.

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These additions should be juxtaposed against one significant deletion: the anti-creedal statement that Seventh-day Adventists believed in the “Bible and the Bible alone” was modified to state that they believed in the “Bible.” The Bible remained the only creed for Seventh-day Adventists, but Adventists recognized different hermeneutical approaches based upon different presuppositions. In this sense Adventists remained in harmony with the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, or the belief that the Bible should interpret the Bible, and not rely upon church tradition.

Taken together the 1980 “Fundamental Beliefs” was a strong affirmation of the 1931 “Statement of Beliefs.” Both strongly emphasized the sanctuary doctrine in response to theological challenges. Both strongly emphasized the Trinity doctrine. And while not as explicit at first, the 1980 “Fundamental Beliefs” appeared to answer challenges at the time toward revelation/inspiration. Theological priorities had both remained the same as well as shifted. Now, not only were the margins more clearly defined, but the new emphasis on ecclesiology gave more substance to what was within the boundaries of Adventist theology.⁴¹ Earlier private confessions now received full public scrutiny.

Finally, what are some of the larger patterns in the development of Adventist theology? How do these contribute to unity?

5. Theological Development and Unity

Seventh-day Adventists have consistently affirmed the Bible as their only creed. This openness toward change, in large part a response to the theological milieu in which Sabbatarian Adventism was born, created a fear of a public creed. The 1872 statement of beliefs by Uriah Smith morphed into a subtly more visible statement of beliefs by a small committee instead of a single individual. This changed after 1946 when the General Conference voted that any future changes must be done in General Conference session, which forced a private declaration to undergo full public scrutiny in 1980. “Perhaps the most astounding and important thing about the 1980 statement of fundamental beliefs is the preamble,” observes

⁴¹ For recent explorations in Adventist ecclesiology, see Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ed. *Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009), and idem., *Message, Mission and Unity of the Church* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2013).

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Adventist historian George R. Knight, “The preamble not only begins with the historic Adventist statement that ‘Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures,’ but also leaves the way open for further revision.”⁴² One thing that did not change between the three Seventh-day Adventist confessions was a commitment to present truth even if the “alone” part was dropped in 1980. It should be noted that Adventists have always adhered to the belief that absolute truth exists, but that our human understanding of truth is limited and therefore it is this understanding of truth that grows over time. The statement did not prescribe a specific approach to Scripture, which would leave room for later clarification.⁴³ Yet at the very heart of Adventist theology there remains a commitment to study the Bible in order to progressively better understand what is truth.

All three statements furthermore appear to have been generated in response to theological challenges to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The first was in response to other Adventist groups, in particular, Miles Grant. The 1931 and 1980 Statements of Beliefs were strong affirmations of the sanctuary doctrine. In a sense the sanctuary doctrine played a unifying role by being the theological focus of these statements of beliefs. The internal and unifying nature of the sanctuary doctrine cannot overestimated. Ellen G. White observes this significance in relationship to the search for truth soon after the Great Disappointment:

The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great advent movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people.⁴⁴

⁴² Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 23-24.

⁴³ Cf. the statement on “Methods of Bible Study” approved by the General Conference Executive Committee at the Annual Council session in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 12, 1986. It is available at: <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/-/methods-of-bible-study/> [accessed Feb. 15, 2016].

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), 423.

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Similarly, new challenges from science brought up questions about the origins of the earth. This was addressed by restricting the 1980 statement to biblical language. Perhaps an unintended result was that both literal Creationists, who adhered to a short time chronology, as well as those who adhered to a much longer time span, discovered that they could each live with this language. Thus, a compromise was achieved that allowed two mutually exclusive worldviews to co-exist.

One notable shift in Adventist theology between 1872 and 1980, as Bull and Lockhart observe, concerns the atonement. In 1872 Smith argued that the atonement began on October 22, 1844. This concept was affirmed and expanded in 1980 but with the added emphasis on Christ's death as an atoning sacrifice. This emphasis was at least due in large part to the evangelical conferences and publication of *Questions on Doctrine* in 1957. Another notable shift that occurred from 1872 to 1980 was the development of the Adventist understanding of the Trinity doctrine, especially as it pertained to the full Divinity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

The transition from a private to a public confession demonstrates a need to define the boundaries of Seventh-day Adventist theology. Although denominational pioneers were excluded during the Millerite revival, as the Sabbatarian Adventist movement matured, they were through their interactions with other Adventist groups forced to distinguish themselves from others. The exchange between Miles Grant and James White demonstrates a reluctant embrace of confessionalism. Such a statement "inevitably excludes those who disagree with its content."⁴⁵

Later boundaries were defined not from without, but from within. The genesis of the 1931 and 1980 confessions furthermore demonstrates that later confessions were in large part due to internal theological challenges. While Seventh-day Adventists clung to the notion of progressive truth, they increasingly defined the boundaries of orthodoxy. The orthodoxy centered in an affirmation of the core doctrine of the sanctuary. This did not change even as the articulation of beliefs grew from a private declaration (1872) to a full public and voted statement of Fundamental Beliefs (1980). Unity did not require complete uniformity as each statement showcases various

⁴⁵ Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative*, 44.

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theological priorities, but the sanctuary doctrine was a non-negotiable that defined orthodoxy versus heresy.

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